

July 11, 2001

TO: Board Members and Staff

FROM: Mr. Don Sloma  
Executive Director

RE: ACCESS TO MEDICAL SERVICES

**Background**

At each Board meeting during Fiscal Year 2001, serious concerns were presented to the Board about access to needed medical care. Exclusions and limitations in medical insurance coverage, managed care practices, provider shortages, Medicaid program reimbursement concerns, provider and carrier pullouts and more have been reported to the Board, often with dire predictions about their impact on community health status.

On September 13, 2000, the Board adopted a menu style list of Recommended Critical Health Services for Washington State Residents. (See Attachment 1) The menu was developed to advance the debate over access to medical care by focusing discussion on those services that had demonstrated efficacy, public health benefit, and wide professional consensus.

The Board also developed the menu to support the implementation of the Public Health Improvement Plan and its recently adopted Standards for Public Health in Washington State. The Standards contain a section outlining state and local public health agency activities to assure that residents get the services they need. (See Attachment 2 for the relevant Standards)

Since the Board approved the menu, consultants to the Board, Board staff and PHIP staff have each distributed summary documents explaining the menu and outlining its potential uses by public health officials, state health policy decision makers and others. (See Attachments 3, 4 and 5)

The Board directed staff to distribute these documents and to encourage discussion of the menu by local health jurisdictions, public and private medical care purchasers, providers, regulators and others interested in access to medical care.

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In February, 2001, Governor Locke created a new Sub-Cabinet on Health composed of representatives from state agencies with significant health responsibilities. The Sub-Cabinet includes the Board, and is headed by the Administrator of the State Health Care Authority. The Sub-Cabinet is broadly charged with reviewing and recommending health policy improvements.

Last winter, Washington State's Office of Financial Management was awarded a one year planning grant from the federal Health Resources and Services Administration to examine access to health insurance in Washington and to recommend improvements.

At the Board's May 2001 meeting, Group Health CEO Emeritus and 2001 Washington Health Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award winner Aubrey Davis addressed the Board regarding access to medical care. He challenged both government and private entities to develop policies to support universal access to needed medical care. At that meeting, the Board directed staff to invite Insurance Commissioner Mike Kreidler to share his views on this subject with the Board, together with any actions he might be considering in this area.

At the Board's June 2001 meeting, Board staff presented research on potential Board priorities for the 2001-2003 biennium that identified widespread concern about access to medical care and problems with medical care financing systems as a consistently high priority for suggested Board action among key informants, in studies and among Board members.

When representatives of the Southwest Washington Health District were contacted for today's meeting and asked which issue was most pressing for them to bring to the Board's attention, they identified access to medical care.

As a result, Chair Lake asked that today's agenda include presentations from the Southwest Washington Health District and local medical care providers, from state Insurance Commissioner Mike Kreidler, from Acting Health Care Authority Administrator and Acting Chair of Governor Locke's Sub-Cabinet on Health, Ida Zodrow, and from representatives of Washington State's HRSA Planning Grant on Access.

### **Board Action Requested:**

Together these presentations are intended as background as the Board considers setting priorities for its own work. No action is requested in direct response to any of the morning's presentations.